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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 001348

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/PB, SCA/FO, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING FOR BANGLADESH'S RAPID
ACTION BATTALION OFF TO A GOOD START

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary
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11. (C) On December 14 and 15, an interagency team of instructors from the Departments of State and Defense launched the first human rights training module for Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). The training objective was to help the RAB establish a centralized complaint reporting mechanism. Trainers found that the RAB already possessed the necessary infrastructure to establish a complaints system. RAB members agreed on the need to strengthen the system, publicize its existence, and ensure transparency in its operation. The Ambassador addressed the trainees and met with their Director General to highlight this positive first step towards professionalizing the RAB through continued engagement.

RAB Should Police Itself
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12. (C) Following interagency approval of our proposed human rights engagement plan for the RAB, a team of instructors from US Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) and the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) conducted a two day training course for senior officers December 14) 15. During this first module of human rights training, USG trainers emphasized the need to establish transparent systems for investigating human rights abuses and ensuring accountability for RAB officers. (Note: Our goal is to help the RAB improve its ability to respect human rights as a precursor for further counter-terrorism assistance.) Trainers emphasized the importance of establishing a transparent system to track complaints of human rights abuses by RAB officers in order to allow the institution to police itself. As one component of such a system, USG representatives offered to assist the RAB in creating a call center and a complaint reporting process. This would include publicizing the existence of the complaint system and purpose of the call center, creating a tracking system and follow-up mechanism on the RAB website to note the status of complaints, and publicly distributing information on resolved cases.

Protecting the Reputations of Accusers and Accused
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13. (C) The RAB participants understood the need for greater transparency and agreed to create a centralized complaints mechanism. At the same time, RAB leadership noted the need to protect the status and reputation of both the accusers and

the accused. USG and RAB representatives agreed that the complaint mechanism could include an identification system (such as a number system) that could maintain confidentiality while meeting requirements for greater transparency. US trainers also highlighted the need for the RAB to continue to share detailed information on human rights abuses as they occurred in order to allow for continued effective Leahy vetting.

Centralizing and Promoting RAB's Current Complaint System =====

14. (C) RAB participants noted that the organization already had the infrastructure needed to establish a functioning complaint call center. At present, this center functions like a "911" system, and is charged with receiving requests for RAB assistance. USG representatives suggested that the current system be centralized and expanded to provide a mechanism for civilians to report alleged RAB abuses. USG trainers assessed the current telephone and IT systems as technically sufficient to handle the increased call volume generated by a centralized complaint call center. Possible next steps include providing the RAB with a subject matter expert exchange and subsequent training session on best practices from other law enforcement complaint centers. Further training should include counseling and automated file systems management. The RAB has begun to investigate the feasibility of establishing a nationwide toll free access number, *101, but currently lacks the financial resources to implement that program. Initial estimates for costs associated with establishing this toll free access number

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exceeded \$500,000.

Establishing Accountability will be a Tough Nut to Crack =====

15. (C) While the first training focused on creating a transparent system to track complaints, USG trainers also highlighted the need for RAB to build accountability for human rights violations into its mode of operations. Trainers explained that complaints involving alleged human rights violations needed to be investigated through a credible internal process. RAB members explained that such a process was already in place to adjudicate most violations, but that cases of alleged encounter killings were investigated by the public courts. RAB leadership noted that the adjudication of these cases was "out of their hands." Participants also claimed that no RAB member had been found guilty of unwarranted use of force in the case of an encounter killing. Trainers underscored the importance of conducting credible investigations to demonstrate that RAB is holding its forces accountable for their actions. RAB participants explained that its intelligence officers at the headquarters and battalion levels currently investigate other abuses such as extortion, robbery, and breach of discipline. The RAB does hold its officers accountable for these types of violations.

Ambassador Discussion with DG =====

16. (C) In an office call with the RAB DG, Ambassador Moriarty expressed optimism that the RAB's successful completion of the human rights training would lay the foundation for long-lasting co-operation with the USG. The RAB DG expressed his gratitude for the human rights training and expressed interest in completing this first phase as soon as possible. The DG highlighted RAB's credibility among Bangladeshis, noting the Battalion's actions have created general acceptance among the population. The DG also claimed that the RAB could be much more effective in remote areas, for example Khulna Division, if it possessed maritime and air assets. The DG expressed optimism about the upcoming December 29 parliamentary elections, stating that he thought

the elections would be held on time and in a peaceful manner.

Next Steps for RAB Engagement

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¶7. (C) USG representatives agreed to provide RAB with a list of human rights violations that would be subject to internal RAB disciplinary procedures. We will coordinate with DRL to develop this list in accordance with international human rights standards. We will also develop a strategy to assist RAB in developing its human rights complaint communications system to incorporate the suggested changes to its existing infrastructure. We will also continue to track alleged human rights violations for Leahy vetting purposes. Future training, to be conducted with assistance from DOJ, will focus on helping RAB establish planning processes that fix responsibility, accountability, and Rules of Engagement (ROE). This will include establishing an official orders and reports system required to properly plan, execute, and investigate (as necessary) operations. Such a system will be crucial to improving RAB's ability to investigate potential human rights violations.

Comment

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¶8. (C) The first human rights training module was a positive step toward what we hope will be continuing engagement with the RAB. It was important for us to begin this first phase prior to the handover of power to an elected government following the December 29 elections, in order to create some momentum that can carry through the transition. The RAB is eager to work with us to complete this first phase and move on to subsequent phases of training as quickly as possible. We have underscored that the timing of Phase 2 training will depend upon the RAB's meeting the three objectives of Phase 1 human rights training. Building a transparent complaint system will help the RAB to meet the first objective of human rights training. Establishing a transparent system of accountability for RAB members will be the focus of

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forthcoming training sessions. With the assistance from our interagency USG partners, we believe we have begun to construct a strong foundation for future RAB engagement. We look forward to the taking the next step in early January, following Bangladesh's elections.

MORIARTY